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VOC FOR PGM/FN  
BACKGROUNDER 5-6319  
RUSSELL SPLANE/MIAMI

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# GUADELOUPE: SUMMIT SITE

ANNCR:

GUADELOUPE--THE FRENCH WEST INDIES ISLAND WHERE PRESIDENT CARTER AND THREE OTHER WESTERN LEADERS WILL MEET EARLY IN JANUARY-- IS FREQUENTLY CALLED "THE EMERALD OF THE CARIBBEAN"--AND WITH GOOD CAUSE. VOA CORRESPONDENT RUSSELL SPLANE TALKS ABOUT THE ISLAND IN THIS REPORT FROM MIAMI.

VOICE:

ROMANTICS CALL THE ISLAND BUTTERFLY-SHAPED ALTHOUGH A MORE PROSAIC OBSERVER ONCE SAID IT LOOKED LIKE A PAIR OF INFLATED WATER WINGS. IT EARNS THIS DESCRIPTION BECAUSE GUADELOUPE ACTUALLY IS TWO ISLANDS SEPARATED BY A ONE HUNDRED METER WIDE CHANNEL THAT ISLANDERS CALL THE RIVER SALEE (SAH-LAY). A DRAWBRIDGE LINKS THE TWO HALVES. GUADELOUPE, LIKE ITS SISTER FRENCH ISLAND TO THE SOUTH, MARTINIQUE, IS AN OVERSEAS DEPARTMENT OF FRANCE. ITS THREE HUNDRED THIRTY-SEVEN THOUSAND RESIDENTS--MAINLY OF AFRICAN, INDIAN AND FRENCH DESCENT--ARE ALL CITIZENS OF FRANCE. FRENCH IS THE OFFICIAL AND COMMERCIAL LANGUAGE ALTHOUGH CREOLE--A PATOIS OF FRENCH WITH AFRICAN, ENGLISH AND SPANISH INFLUENCES--IS HEARD THROUGHOUT THE ISLAND.

GUADELOUPE IS PART OF THE LEEWARD ISLAND CHAIN IN THE LESSER ANTILLES. IT IS SANDWICHED IN BETWEEN PRESENT OR FORMER BRITISH POSSESSIONS-- MONTSERRAT AND ANTIGUA TO THE NORTH, AND NEWLY INDEPENDENT DOMINICA TO THE SOUTH. CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS IS CREDITED WITH DISCOVERING GUADELOUPE ON NOVEMBER FOURTH, 1493.

THE EASTERN WING OF THE ISLAND, LOW-LYING GRAND-TERRE, IS MAINLY CULTIVATED IN SUGAR CANE, BANANAS, PINEAPPLE, MANGOES AND

CITRUS FRUIT. THE ISLAND'S LARGEST CITY--PONTE-A-PITRE--AND ITS AIRPORT ARE LOCATED ON GRAND-TERRE.

BUT CROSS THE RIVER SALEE TO THE WESTERN HALF OF THE ISLAND, KNOWN AS BASSE-TERRE, AND YOU'RE IN A DIFFERENT WORLD. INAPPROPRIATELY NAMED, THIS WING IS ANYTHING BUT A LOWLAND. IT IS MOUNTAINOUS AND RUGGED WITH MANY RIVERS, WATERFALLS AND DENSE RAIN FORESTS. PUSHING WEST, YOU'LL SOON FIND YOURSELVES ON THE SLOPES OF BUBBLING LA SOUFRIERE, THE FOURTEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-METER HIGH VOLCANIC MOUNTAIN, REPORTEDLY THE HIGHEST PEAK IN THE CARIBBEAN. IN THE FOOTHILLS OF LA SOUFRIERE LIES THE CITY OF BASSE-TERRE, THE CAPITAL OF THE ISLAND.

IN NAMING THE ISLAND, COLUMBUS IS SAID TO HAVE KEPT A PROMISE MADE TO MONKS AT THE MONASTERY OF GUADELOUPE IN SPAIN. HE TOOK POSSESSION OF THE ISLAND IN THE NAME OF FERDINAND AND ISABELLA OF SPAIN. BUT PONCE DE LEON AND OTHER SPANISH SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE NEVER SUCCEEDED IN COLONIZING THE ISLAND AND ABANDONED IT IN 1604. THE FRENCH MOVED IN IN 1635 AND GUADELOUPE BECAME A FULL-FLEDGED DEPARTMENT OF FRANCE IN 1946.

DRIVING OVER GRAND-TERRE TO THE SPARKLING BEACHES ON THE NORTHEAST COAST ONE FREQUENTLY SPOTS THE SMALL, WEASEL-LIKE MONGOOSE SCURRYING ACROSS THE ROAD. THIS POSSIBLY IS ONE REASON WHY THERE ARE NO SNAKES ON GUADELOUPE.

WHAT DOES ONE EAT ON THE ISLAND? THE CUISINE IS CREOLE AND FRENCH, WITH SEAFOOD A SPECIALTY. VISITORS TO THIS EMERALD ISLAND ARE ADVISED TO TRY FLUFFY COCONUT CREPES, LAND CRAB FARCI AND THE GUADELOUPIAN RUM PUNCHES.

WJL/GS